

The Duke 441

Chapter 441 - It's Worth It

The fear that Samael had instilled in them was enough to last a lifetime. With having an option of death or acknowledging the new emperor, everyone had no choice but to choose the latter willingly. Yes, willingly... if that was even what it was called.

Samael ascended the throne with no problem after that and even mobilized more nobles to contribute to the empire. Of course, their contribution was all due to fear of the devil breathing down their neck.

A different approach from the previous king, indeed. But who would dare compare? Stefan was already "dead", and no one would challenge Samael. Even if there were a few capable individuals, they already sided with him.

The seed of fear and grudge continued to grow over the years. During the first two years, people who didn't fear death had joined hands to stop his tyranny and even got some support from other small kingdoms. But the outcome was already set in stone.

In the end, even life had terrified those who opposed the emperor. No mercy for those who challenged him. If death doesn't terrify them, then life would. That was the tyrant's golden punishment.

After setting too many examples, these lessons finally etched deep into their mind, heart, and soul. The subject of the Great Heart Empire soon acknowledged the Emperor's power with all their hearts.

Obviously, once the fear settled in their hearts, and the fact that the emperor wouldn't budge, peace followed.

The rule of the empire was simple.

As long as they follow the emperor and abide by the imperial law, one would sleep in peace. Only those who bore ill-intention would have to sleep with one eye — or have none at all.

Moreover, a lot of opportunities opened up, especially for those commoners, women, humans, and inferior vampires. One could say, aside from those dark days of Samael's reign, the empire had reached heights far greater than anyone would have thought.

From north to west, to east, and some parts of the south had formed a powerful formation that protected the mainland. The people Samael tossed in those areas had also made their name known by many and became the greatest supporters of the empire; the Earldom creating an impregnable wall in the north while producing elite knights, the Duke of Grimsbanne in the west flourished in trades and foreign affairs, and the Marchioness in the east who resolved the drought and even made it into a major source of agriculture.

Rufus, the military general under the king, held the authority of ensuring justice and peace across the empire. With his piling military achievements, kingdoms who heard his name would immediately raise a white flag.

With these people under the emperor and supporting him with all their lives, they had unified the mainlands of the empire. One knew they had to face all those people before the emperor.

That was how the Heart's Kingdom, which was on the verge of falling, became the Great Heart Empire that lived in its name. Under the reign of the so-called tyrant, who ended up being hailed as the greatest emperor, Samael Vaughnn Caecilius La Crox.

Little did everyone know, the emperor they all hailed and worshiped wasn't even in the capital during all those times. He was in the far south, tending to his bedridden wife and changing his son's diapers.

"What did you say?" Samael raised a brow, gazing at the window of the carriage where Ramin was riding his steed outside.

"Charlotte sent a letter that Her Majesty, along with the young master and the earl, went out to the downtown," Ramin repeated helplessly, feeling sorry for Charlotte. She probably couldn't stop Lilou and the children from sneaking out. So, she could only shoot an arrow to send her message like usual.

A shallow sigh slipped past Samael's lips before he nodded. "Bring all crates to my estate, I will go pick them up."

"Yes, Your Ma --" Ramin bit his tongue, seeing Samael's knowing look. "Yes, Master. I will tell the coachman about your destination."

"Good."

With that being said, Ramin informed the coachman of the carriage destination. The wagons that were following Samael's carriage soon followed Ramin and headed to the Roux Estate, while Samael's carriage headed to the downtown.

"She's so mischievous..." he whispered, resting the side of his head against the carriage while staring outside the open window. "No wonder Law never ceases to give me a headache."

A subtle smile resurfaced on his lips, thinking that he was finally going home with a conscious wife. That their family was complete.

"I hope they don't get in trouble," he chuckled softly, thinking that his wife was the type of person who was akin to a magnet of trouble. Last night, for example, he had to expose his identity to Jaime Malum, which he didn't plan on doing for at least the next several months.

Well, not that it bothered him, since he might also do the same if Law asked him. His son was great friends with the Earl, after all. And it was only a matter of time before Law would do something more silly than attempting to "elope" with the young earl.

"Right... his birthday is coming up soon. I wonder if I should invite Rufus since my son seemed to like the military general so much." — that had caused Fabian's agony as his little master admired Rufus but see him as a pushover. "Hah... I shouldn't do that or Fabi will cry a river."

Samael indulged himself in these sorts of thoughts, tossing all important affairs of the empire and his small businesses in the south at the back of his head. He pondered over Law's birthday in two months until the carriage stopped as soon as it reached the downtown.

He informed the coachman to wait for him in its station while going on his own. The downtown of Minowa wasn't that huge. Samael was certain he would find his wife and son soon if he just walked around.

The downtown was bustling than ever with the upcoming festival. He gazed at the people setting up the banners, some decorating their stalls, children playing around. During this time of the year in the south, people somehow forgot the problems in this place.

He understood the magic of this festival, though.

A subtle smile resurfaced on his lips, recalling the first time he attended the festival with his three-year-old son. It was both their first time, watching the fireworks and just trying out the street food. That time with Law made him forget about his woes and yearnings of his wife's absence.

'My son... had saved me that time... no, actually, he had saved me the second he was born,' he thought, thinking that if not for Law's existence, Samael would've lost his mind a long time ago.

Beatrice was correct. Samael had regretted everything he had said before Law was even born.

"I should silence her before she uses that against me," he murmured, stopping in his tracks when he caught sight of Lilou in front of a stall across from him. She was holding the two boys; Law on her right and Adam on her left.

His eyes softened, watching them from a distance. His son had this bright grin on his face, holding cotton candy.

"That fool... he never smiles at me even when I told him I will give him an entire storage of sweets," he murmured along with a low chuckle, shoving his hand inside his pockets. "So, he can smile and act like a child, huh?"

He watched them from that vantage point for as long as he could, enjoying every second of it and ignoring the passers-by. His eyes stung as a frustrating tension built up in his throat.

'That's my heart right there,' he whispered in his head while he smiled gently. 'Everything I went through... is worth it seeing them smile without worry.'

After some time, he noticed Charlotte lean towards Lilou. After whispering in her ear, Lilou turned her head in his direction.

"Sam~!" Lilou waved, making the two boys turn in his direction as well. "My husband~!"

Seeing that Lilou was waving at him and then the two boys as well, the ice that was surrounding his cold heart all these years melted. In his eyes, everything aside from his wife and son was a blur, and it was a wonderful sight he would never forget forever.

"I don't like sweets," he whispered before jogging towards them to join them.

Chapter 442 - So Cute~

Law, Adam, and I tried the arcades in the street fair of Minowa as soon as we reached the downtown. At first, the two young boys were anxious. Who wouldn't? We snuck out, and I felt bad for instilling that we were being 'mischievous' right now.

So, my job was to erase that anxiety. After playing a few games and winning some stuffed toys, Adam and Law relaxed and gradually forgot about their worries. Since we've played enough, I took them to the sweet stall where my mouth had been watering ever since I noticed it.

"3 cotton balls please." The merchant smiled at me and prepared three cotton balls. I gazed down at Law and Adam, giggling with them.

"Here are the two cotton balls for those lovely sons of Madam!"

"Heh. Wait, I'll get them for you," I said, releasing Adam and Law's hand to receive the cotton balls in a stick. With a smile, I handed them to the two boys, who accepted it with delight.

"Thank you, Mother," expressed Law, with his cheek painted with light pink.

"Thank you, Madam Roux," Adam also spoke happily.

I darted my eyes between them, covering my lips. They looked so cute and my heart was melting! I felt like weeping, especially when their eyes twinkled at their first bite.

"So cute..." came out a murmur, holding my breath at this level of cuteness. My brow raised when Charlotte, who was hugging the stuffed toys, suddenly stepped beside me. I leaned closer to her as she whispered in my ear.

"His Majesty is here," she informed, making me freeze on the spot with eyes dilating. I looked at Charlotte, aghast that Sam had already found us. She perked her chin in a certain direction while I swallowed down a mouthful of saliva.

'I should act normal,' I told myself, thinking how to avoid Sam's scolding. I cleared my throat and sported a bright smile before turning my head in my husband's direction.

My eyes searched for him and when I caught him standing from across the street, my heart warmed up. He was looking at us lovingly with a gentle smile on his lips.

'Ahh... that's my husband right there,' I thought as the side of my lips curled up, raising my hand up and waving it without care.

"Sam~! My husband~!" I waved and waved excitedly until I felt Law and Adam's gaze. I glanced down at them and they were already looking in Sam's direction.

"Quick, wave your hands!" I urged the two. They cast me a look but said nothing as they waved at him as well.

"Sammy~!" this time, I raised both my hands and waved them sideways. I giggled when I saw him chuckle and shake his head. Sam then jogged his way towards us and my initial fear gradually vanished.

'He wasn't angry, right?' I wondered, studying Sam when he stopped in front of us.

Sam let out a shallow breath, staring at me and then at Law and Adam. "What should I do with you three?" came out a helpless remark, giving me hope that he wouldn't tell us to come back.

"Husband~" I skipped a step and hooked my arms around him. "Since you're here, you will naturally spend more time with us. Everyone is busy preparing for the festival. There's a lot of stalls we haven't even tried yet."

Sam looked at me while I fluttered my eyelashes coquettishly. I don't recall acting cute in front of him, so I was a little awkward.

"Father, will you come with us?" asked Law, tugging the hem of Sam's tailcoat while gazing up at us. Sam and I instinctively looked down to see Law and Adam staring at us adorably. It was as if once Sam said no, their eyes would well up immediately.

"So cute..." I whispered, leaning closer to my beloved husband. "Husband, if you break their hearts, I would break all the bones you have."

Sam let out a chuckle and glanced at me with narrowed eyes. "My wife, you make me wish I was also a child."

"But you're fine this way..." I pouted, blinking countless times, so the three of us were attacking him with our charms.

"Goodness..." he let out a defeated sigh before he nodded. "Fine."

"Yes!" The side of my lips stretched even wider as I gazed at the two bundles of joy who were grinning back at me. I winked at them as we succeeded in taking Sam with us and avoided being scolded. Now, we didn't have to worry about anything.

"So, where do you plan to go?" asked Sam, cocking his head to the side while darting his eyes from me to Law and Adam.

"Father, there is this challenge with a huge pot money as a prize," Law answered after a second of pondering, spreading his arms as to highlight how huge the prize he was talking about. I thought about which game he was referring to and rocked my head when I realized which game it was.

Arm wrestling!

"My son, you like that sort of game?" I gasped while gazing at Law. My son pressed his lips together as if thinking if he said something wrong.

"Ah, no." I squatted down, releasing Sam from me. "I mean, you could've told me earlier, but well, it's not like we can win against that buff guy, right?"

The reason I didn't even bat an eye on the pamphlet earlier was that I thought they wouldn't like it. But I guess boys were boys. I didn't mean they liked violence, but more like they liked challenges, especially to prove how 'manly' they were.

"My son, how huge is the prize money? I will triple it." I frowned at Sam's reply and glared daggers at him. "I mean, sure. Let's do that."

"You will?" Law inquired curiously. "It is a battle of strength, father."

'Oh, son... it pains me that you don't know what is your father like in the past,' I uttered internally, looking at my curious son. 'But well, I guess it's better that he doesn't know what his parents like before him.'

"Yes." Sam nodded and planted his palm on Law's head. "Your father likes everything about money."

Since when? That was what I wanted to ask, but oh well, perhaps money now had a special place in his heart.

"That's settled then. Let's go?" I tossed all the unnecessary thoughts I had in my head and smiled at Law and Adam. Once I got up, I held Law's hand, and he held Adam's. Adam then gazed up at Sam when my husband offered his hand.

"We can't let you feel out of place, can we?" he inquired in a knowing tone, making the young earl smile warmly. So, Adam took my husband's hand as we headed to this arm wrestling challenge.

With me on the left, then Law, Adam, and Sam. We're more like a family of four now, and I was glad to see that Adam could have this beautiful memory.

As I looked at them, I caught Sam's gaze and smiled. He smiled back at me gently.

'It feels warm...' I thought, thinking that we weren't just imagining starting a family anymore. Sam and I... already had a son and we're a family now.

Chapter 443 - [Bonus]Eat A Lot

It didn't take long when we reach the street for that arm-wrestling event. Unlike earlier, there were more men trying to get that huge prize money and occupied the street.

I looked at Sam and spoke when he gazed back. "Will you really participate?"

"Hmm. Yes. You?"

"Sam." I cast him a knowing look, and he rocked his head. Sam then glanced at the two and smiled innocently.

"Let's go," he said, not explaining why he asked me if I was going to take part as well. I was trying to be modest here, so taking part in this arm-wrestling would mind-boggle these two young boys. This wasn't the capital, nor Grimsbanne, after all.

The five of us, Charlotte, included who was still following us, squeeze ourselves into the crowd. There were still small gaps in between the crowd, so it was easy for Law and Adam, while we, the adults, struggled a little.

Good gracious... how could we do this to the emperor?

When we reached the front, my eyes instantly caught the buff topless guy already taking up the challenger. The crowds cheered while I noticed some who were already betting.

How smart, I thought. If one couldn't challenge that guy, they would rather gain a little money by betting. Should I bet too?

I leaned towards Sam's side since Law and Adam stood in front of us. Sam raised a brow as he lowered his head.

"My husband, can you lend me money?" I asked and noticed his brows wiggle in confusion. "I will bet everything on you and double the money."

"My wife, are you trying to scam these poor people?"

I nearly choked at how he worded it. "Of course not! How can you say that to me? This is a bet, so of course, it's a win or lose."

"But you already know the outcome," Sam argued back knowingly, raising his brows while looking at me as if judging me.

"No? Who knows if this guy has some superpowers and beats you?" I blurted out, just getting out whatever argument I could, no matter how lame it sounded. "You can just refuse if you don't want to lend me money."

"I don't have to lend you." I frowned when I heard his response, but it was soon replaced with astonishment a second later. "Half of the money I earned in trades here in the south is under your name and the other half is for Law. You can spend yours in a single night and I won't mind."

"Really?" My eyes twinkled while he sported a helpless look.

"Do you like it that much?"

I nodded profusely, moved by my husband's generosity. I started liking money back when I was managing the duchy; it gave me a lot of privileges, after all.

"You're the best, you know that?" I stood on my toes to whisper in his ear, winking as I drew back. But Sam raised a brow and narrowed his eyes suspiciously.

"Because of my money?"

"No. Because you're planning for our son's future." The side of my lips stretched as my initial plan to bet disappeared into my head. How could I bet my husband's hard-earned money now?

WOOOH!

Suddenly, a loud cheer from the crowd snapped me back to the current lapse. Sam and I turned our gaze to the two men arm-wrestling. The champion stood victorious, standing up from his seat while raising both his fists up. Meanwhile, the challenger winced from the pain of defeat.

I clapped my hands and smiled weakly, watching the champion cheer until his spit was flying out of his mouth and clung onto his untrimmed beard. He looked happy and only then did I hear this was the fifth time he won in a matter of an hour.

To get the prize money, one must defeat ten challengers. It felt like a scam, since who would have the energy to arm wrestle ten consecutive rounds in a row? Not to mention, that champion was already a challenge.

"So cool..." Law muttered in amusement, making me gaze down at him. "I want to be just as strong as him."

"You should eat a lot, Law. I think the bigger you are, the stronger a man becomes."

My son and Adam seemed to admire the strength of that man, which was cute. Now that I thought about it, my son seemed to be hungry for strength. It made me wonder if it was because of Adam's situation? I was once a child and a helpless adult, so I sort of understood my son, if that was the case.

"Who's next?" asked the host of the event while looking at the crowd. He kept talking while the men gathered looked at each other, and then at the champion. I noticed how their enthusiastic eyes dimmed with reluctance.

Who would go after that man, after all? The last challenger didn't seem too weak as he held his ground for quite some time. It was just that the champion was stronger.

Was he a vampire? I wondered, staring at him longer than I realized it. It seemed that in the land of Minowa, that question doesn't even cross many people. It could be a good thing since vampires and humans seemed to co-exist, or it was just that Jaime made sure the people should fear him more than races.

"Me." I was brought back from my thoughts when I heard Sam's voice. I looked at him and saw him raising a hand.

"I'll challenge him." His expression was the same, it lacked interest. He glanced at me and then at the two boys, but said nothing.

"Father, you will really do it?" Law inquired with genuine surprise in his voice. Didn't he trust his father that much? Considering that Charlotte told me Sam stayed out of trouble, it would shock Law if he saw his father do things he 'never did' before.

"Don't you want me to?" Sam raised a brow before marching towards the open space surrounded by people. He looked up at the champion while the latter snickered.

"Pretty boy, are you sure about this?" asked the muscular champion, but Sam just looked up at him without a word.

"Mother..."

My son suddenly turned around and faced me with worry dominating his face. Even Adam looked at me the same way. Law asked his father and now that Sam listened to him, my son was worried.

"It's alright," I said with a smile, squatting down to meet them at eye level. "Your father will be fine, alright? Trust him."

I darted my eyes from Law to Adam, chuckling as I held their small hands before standing up.. "Just watch."

Chapter 444 - Glory

I squeezed their hand and gazed down again to reassure them not to worry. After that, I set my eyes on Sam and the arm-wrestling champion.

The host of the event stood in between them, announcing to the crowd to put their bets before the round started. My eyes scanned the crowd, some chipping their money in a hat.

'So the betting is really allowed, huh?' I nodded, as it only made sense to make it more interesting. I didn't pay attention to them longer as I cast my gaze at Sam.

Studying Sam and the champion by their appearance, it looked like my husband didn't have the slightest chance. Unlike the topless champion, who was parading his robust physique plus his towering height, my husband looked like a spoiled noble.

I had always known my husband was handsome, but now that I study him from this distance, he looked more refined. In the past, his hair would rarely meet the comb and he would always be in his loose white blouse. But now, although his hair wasn't as neat as those aristocrats, its tufts didn't fly away in a random direction. Not to mention Sam in a vest and tailcoat?

Divine.

'He didn't even age in the past five years. If anything, he looked more gorgeous than ever.' I nodded, agreeing with my internal comments.

"You. You better not go home crying to your mother once I break your arm." The champion taunted, but that didn't faze my husband. "I won't give you mercy unless you plead on your knees."

"If I plead, you will forfeit?" asked Sam with disinterest in his voice, cocking his head to the side.

"Hah! Maybe? Why don't you try?" the Champion snickered, smirking viciously.

Sam glanced in our direction and shrugged. "Nevermind. This game is boring since I have already enough money to triple what's inside that pot, so I don't need it."

My brows furrowed, and so was the crowd. Everyone looked at Sam with the same confusion in their eyes — even the Champion could not help but frown. The major highlight of this event was the prize money, after all.

"Boy, what are you trying to say?" the Champion inquired in an authoritative tone, displeased at my husband's remark.

"What about we make a separate bet, Sir?" Sam faced the champion fearlessly and calmly. "If I lose, I will triple the prize money."

There was a moment of silence when Sam dropped his offer before a loud cheer resonated across the entire street. Even the champion chuckled in amusement, nodding at this tempting offer.

"And if you lose?" asked the champion. The cheering crowd went into silence as they listened to Sam once again.

"If I lose..." Sam trailed off as he cast my son a knowing look. "You will attend my son's birthday in two months."

Not just me, but everyone, including the young boys, looked at Sam with shock. Although what surprised me the most was that Law's birthday was coming! My son was getting a year older and it would be the first birthday that I would be there! I gazed down at Law, who was staring at his father blankly.

"What? If he wins, he wants Glory to attend a kid's birthday party?"

"Is this a new insult the nobles created?"

"Pfft--! He has to win first, though."

"But what if he is stronger than he looks?"

Murmurings replaced the cheering; some were having second doubts since Sam was confident. Before Sam offered a new bet, everyone was confident that Glory, the arm wrestling champion, would win. But now, the opinion was split.

"Don't get me wrong, Sir. I am not inviting you to be the clown of the party." Sam explained when Glory roared at this 'insult'. "I am simply inviting you since my son admired strong men like you."

He pointed his thumb in our direction, making Glory the Champion, gazed at us, and then down at Law and Adam. Glory narrowed his eyes, staring intently at the young boys before shifting his attention back to Sam.

"I believed you will keep your word if I put my invitation to a bet. What do you think?" Sam inquired while tilting his head, smiling politely at him.

I couldn't believe what my eyes were seeing and what my ears were hearing. It seemed to me that Sam had his son's interest on top of his head.

"Father..." Law whispered, making me gaze down at him to see how moved he was. "You didn't have to do this."

My heart warmed up at Sam and Law. The first time I heard them converse, they sounded very distant. But it seemed they weren't as distant as I initially thought they were. It was just that they had their own way of showing their affection.

'He is just like Sam,' I thought, planting my palm on Law's head with a warm smile on my face. I ruffled it before setting my eyes back to my husband.

I had always known my husband would be a great father, but witnessing it now still felt different. My eyes stung, but I suppressed my tears from falling.

'I'm so proud of you, Sam,' I whispered in my heart. 'I won't let this devil inside me break our family.'

Soon, when Glory accepted the bet as his honor was on the line, they took their respective spot. Sam on the left and across from him was Glory. The latter snickered as he positioned his elbow, showcasing his brawny arm while closing and opening his fingers. And then Sam let out a shallow breath, positioning his elbow.

"Alright..." the host was standing behind the table, guiding Sam and Glory's arm against each other until it made a cross sign. He held onto them for a moment before yelling, 'now!', and then withdrew his hand away.

But instead of a heated battle of the arm, their arm didn't move. Usually, the challenger should be making ugly faces while trying to down the champion's arm. Alas, Sam and Glory's expression remained the same.

"Huh? What are they doing? Aren't they moving?"

"It's just stuck there..."

"What the...?"

The murmurings grew louder as the situation baffled them. Sam wasn't trying to down Glory, and the latter was giving Sam the honor to do an offense.

"Little boy, I am amused that you mustered the courage to challenge me for your son. So, I'm giving you the liberty to have the upper hand. I will assure you I will go easy on you." Glory snickered confidently while wiggling his eyebrows.

"I see..." Sam nodded and without a change of his expression, he channeled his weight on his arm. It took Glory by surprise but managed to fight Sam's arms before they completely touched the table.

This sudden turn of events caused a momentary silence in the air before the loud cheering deafened my ear.

Chapter 445 - I Don't Need Cheap Tricks To Win

"Wow! What just happened?"

"Is he cheating? Or did Glory go too easy for him?"

"But look at Glory! I have never seen him struggle so much!"

Doubt soon came after, but Glory's twisting face to fight off Sam's arm made it hard to distinguish if what they were seeing was actually happening. Also, why would they rig the game? Sam could triple the prize money.

"Damn..." Glory cursed through his gritted teeth, clutching the end of the table with his free hand.

"Why you... little..."

"You shouldn't go easy on me, Sir. The crowd is booing you." Sam smiled, as there wasn't a trace of struggle on his face. I knew just by looking at their arm that Glory was channeling all his strength, but my husband's arm was just as immovable as the southern walls.

"Boo! Glory! What the hell are you doing?! You look so pathetic!"

"What happened to no mercy! Damn! I put all my money on you! Are you trying to cheat us?!"

"Scram!" Glory roared at the crowd, whose dismay was increasing. "Damn it...!"

With Glory's intimidating growl, the crowd's complaints turned into murmurings once again. Even though I could still hear some comments, I didn't pay attention to them as I watched Glory struggle against my husband. My eyes veered to my husband's rear and noticed the brief smirk that resurfaced on his lips.

'There he was,' I thought as that devious smirk was Sam's signature expression. He was probably having more fun than he thought.

"So, are you coming to my son's birthday party?" asked Sam, but Glory ignored him as he focused on avoiding his arm to go even lower. "I'll send you an official invitation later."

While Sam's arm didn't budge, he raised his head and looked at the crowd. For reasons unknown, he managed to catch the crowd's attention even though he hadn't spoken a word yet.

"I know a lot of you had placed their bets on the champion, but I appreciate those who had placed their money on me. Be it because of ridiculous hope, or you just want to go against the crowd, I don't let down those who put their trust in me." A smile appeared on Sam's lips as he tilted his head down. "I hope you spend your money wisely next time."

As soon as he spouted those words, Sam finally weighed Glory's robust arm down on the table. He didn't even look at his opponent while ending the round. Glory's eyes dilated, staring blankly at his arm underneath Sam's. It happened so fast, so it was surely a shock to him.

Silence dawned on the street while Sam retrieved his arm smoothly. He gazed at us, specifically staring at Law, and offered a smile.

"Father..." Law whispered in awe before Sam faced the shocked host.

"I forfeit the title of the new champion." The event host snapped to the current lapse when Sam snapped his fingers. "I don't plan on defeating nine more."

Sam didn't even wait for the host to grasp his remarks as he marched back towards us. He smiled at me, but before I could smile back, my eyes dilated seeing that Glory towered behind Sam.

"You... what cheap trick did you use?" Glory's voice shook in rage, finally realizing that someone like Sam defeated him without breaking a sweat. There was no greater shame than getting defeated, just like that. His ego was surely wounded.

Sam's brows rose, pivoting on his heel to face the towering giant. Well, he looked like a giant in my eyes — or in the eyes of Law and Adam.

"Sir, I don't need to use cheap tricks to win. Are you going to hit me because you cannot accept your loss? They are children who are watching." His demeanor remained calm, but I felt this cold chill run down my spine. Sam was pulling an aura on him. Not good.

"You...!" Glory's eyes glinted, gnashing his teeth as his fist trembled. But before he could lift his arm, Sam took several calm steps forward. He then held Glory's arm and tugged it down, making Glory's huge physique bend over.

Everyone watched as Sam whisper something that only the two of them could hear. But based on how Glory's eyes went wide and froze, it must be something terrifying. My husband drew away and smiled before marching back at us.

I gazed at the frozen defeated champion and he didn't move an inch. It made me wonder what Sam told him to terrify him like that.

"I won't be claiming the prize money. Is that alright with you?" Sam inquired at Law as soon as he reached us. Law only cast him a look, blinking with surprise in his eyes.

"Aren't you hungry?" he asked and this time, he raised his gaze to me. "Or are there any arcades you want to try?"

"I, no, I mean, there are still some arcades we will try." I shook my head and squeezed Law's shoulder lightly. I waited for the two boys to look up at us before I spoke.

"Right? Or do you want to eat first?"

They only looked at us blankly, as if they still hadn't gotten things wrapped around their heads. The gazes from the crowd also grew intense by the minute.

"Ah! I know this stall that serves the best chicken skewers!" Suddenly, Charlotte snapped us back to our senses since the children couldn't think of an answer.

"Great! Let's try it!" I forced a huge smile on my face but raised my brows when I saw Sam squatted.

"Come. I'll carry you on my back," He motioned to Law, who just got out of his trance. Our son didn't say a word but walked behind Sam. It didn't take long when Law was on his father's shoulder.

"Woah!" Law gasped, wide-eyed when Sam slowly stood on his feet. "Mother!"

I only smiled at him and held Adam's hand. "Let's go?"

With that being said, we walked away together. As we did, the crowd just instinctively made way for us, so our exit went smoothly. It was easy to distract Law and Adam, so they didn't raise questions about what just happened.

Meanwhile, as they walked away, Charlotte looked back at the crowd. Everyone had their eyes on the family of 'four'. Her eyes veered towards Glory, who was staring at Samael blankly.

'His Majesty is getting reckless,' she thought with a sigh but shrugged before following them.

Chapter 446 - [Bonus]I Don't Need The Perfect You

We tried different games in the street fair and collected a fair amount of stuffed toys as prizes. Honestly, I didn't feel tired until Sam and I sat down on a bench around the plaza while Charlotte helped Law and Adam buy some more cotton balls.

I gazed at the stuffed animals on my side, smiling at the numbers we had gathered. We could use all these as decorations for Law's room or mine. (If my son didn't like it.)

"Did you have fun?" I snapped my eyes and turned my head to my right. There, Sam sat beside me with his palm on the bench, leaning back lazily.

"Yes." I pressed my lips, patting the toy animal on my lap. "How about you?"

Sam hummed a long tune, gazing ahead to the plaza's open space. There was public storytelling event and people were flocking around it.

"Of course," he answered after a long pause while the corner of his lips curled up. "It's our first family day-out. It feels like I am in a dream."

He cast me a brief look, shrugging. "Don't you feel the same?"

"You're right..." my smile grew bitter as I gazed down at the stuffed animal on my lap. "It feels surreal... everything feels like a dream — a beautiful one where I don't want to wake up."

I slowly raised my head and immediately caught Charlotte and the two youngsters in the crowd. Law and Adam were dragging our little Charlotte to the storytelling event, making me chuckle softly.

"We now have a son, Sam... and you raised him wonderfully. I feel sorry for him. He didn't have a mother for the first five years of his life, and it terrified me I might disappoint him." I took a deep breath as the reality felt bittersweet. "While he looks at me with an innocent smile, I kept wondering what will I do if he looks at me differently if he gets to know me? I loved him. Deep down, I really do. But I fear his existence."

My last remarks came out muffled as my eyes flickered with bitterness. Spending a day with Law made me happy, but the fear creeping into my heart was just as intense as that happiness. Law was a bundle of joy, and it scared me I would end up ruining him.

"You will be fine." I gazed up at Sam and caught the gentle smile on his face. "I'm very sure of that."

I bit my lower lips, staring at my husband, who had his hundred percent confidence in me. We had a great day today, but at the back of my head, we had problems we hadn't gotten the chance to talk about.

"Sam," I called under my breath, my lower lip trembling. "What did I do to you...? In the past five years, what did that Lilou do to you?"

Sam raised a brow as his lips parted, but no words came out. Instead, he rocked his head and averted his eyes to the crowd. A sigh slipped past my lips, thinking he was avoiding the question.

"Sam, there's something wrong with me." I reached for his hand, waiting for him to look back at me once again before adding, "Please don't keep me in the dark."

"Uh..." he let out a deep murmur, glancing at me as he clipped his fingers on my hand. "Nothing in particular."

"Sam."

"It's true," Sam affirmed with a slight nod. "Aside from talking to me, you did nothing — you can't."

I looked at Sam with bitterness in my eyes. What did he mean by that? I clearly recalled how Charlotte tried to avoid detailing that part. She said she would rather stab her own throat with her arrow than tell me. Surely, it wasn't that simple as what he claimed.

"Lilou." He sported a helpless smile before looking away. "You didn't have to do anything to hurt me."

There was a long pause after he remarked. I waited, staring at his rear, and noticed how his eyes softened with bitter memories. That second, I knew deep in my heart he wasn't lying.

"It's not like I want to keep you in the dark, but you... that Lilou, who wakes up every thirtieth day, can also give me a dream just like today before turning it into a nightmare. During the first three years since your slumber, she made that day of that month dreadful each time, and the more I talked to her, the more I longed for you." Sam let out a bitter chuckle, recalling those days in the past.

"She has a vicious tongue, and she made me feel so pathetic, so helpless, and so... insignificant. But honestly, the reason her words hurt so much is that they were facts." Again, he paused as a ridiculing chortle came out. "That Lilou can't lie for a long time. She might try to deceive me by acting the wife I knew, but she hates it every time I fall for it. Then... I realized, maybe, that is still you."

Sam slowly fluttered his eyelashes and gazed back at me lovingly. "You two act and speak differently, but there were things that you two have something in common."

I pursed my lips and studied his expression. His eyes bore pain and bitterness with a touch of relief.

"You and that Lilou... you both love Law." my breath hitched at his remarks. "She was there and witnessed your growing stomach. She will hurt me with her words, but she never tried to hurt the child inside her. Even when she was in pain, she would wrap her arms around it and suffer in silence. She... You did all that to protect our child, Lilou."

My husband pushed himself lightly and moved closer to me. He placed his hand atop my hand, squeezing it, and offered me a reassuring smile.

"You and that Lilou may have a different persona, but I know you two are the same person, my love." He cupped my jaw while I chewed my lower lip. He caressed my cheek with his thumb, offering me a helpless smile.

"If I can't love that worst version of you, then I don't deserve your best, don't you think?"

"Sam..." I swallowed down the tension building up in my throat. My vision blurred with tears pooling in her eyes, but I still caught him smiling.

"I don't need the perfect you. I — Law and I just need you. So, don't be afraid of committing mistakes because we are not perfect. We were never perfect, Lilou." Sam wiped my tears with the back of his fingers as his voice sounded so soothing, moving my rotting heart.. "And that is alright."

Chapter 447 - Explanations

I felt like a fool, crying in a public space and gathering some unwanted attention. But I didn't care — my husband didn't care as well. Instead, he pulled me into his embrace and patted my back until I stopped bawling my eyes, albeit still hiccuping.

"Since... when.... did you... know how to become so romantic?" I hiccuped while drawing away from his embrace. Sam chuckled playfully as he leaned forward with a pout.

"What are you saying, Silly? I am always the romantic type. Didn't I say we will have a romance that will move even the most callous heart?" he poked the apex of my nose lightly. "Hush now. If Law sees you crying, he will surely dig my grave and push me off of it."

A chuckle slipped past my lips. No wonder he named our son Law. He was Sam's law... and mine as well. His smile remained, wiping the remaining tears from the corner of my eyes.

"You will be fine, Lilou. Having a beast within us is fine, so long as we can tame it," he murmured reassuringly. "I will be there with you every step of the way. Law and I will be there for you. I trust in you, so you have to trust in yourself."

I pressed my lips into a thin line, nodding as I held his hand to my cheek. I loved this man, and this love just continued to grow every passing second. God... how could he be so precious?

We had always been busy fighting off the people who wanted to harm us. This even separated us many times and even planted doubt in our hearts. But until now, we were together. Stronger than ever. Loving more than before. And more grateful than yesterday.

"Thank you," came out a weak voice. "For loving me."

Sam just smiled and let out a shallow breath. My eyes that had recovered from crying welled up again. I could feel my eyes swelling now, but I couldn't help it. I was still scared and I wouldn't deny that. But I knew for sure that with them — with my husband and our son — I would be alright.

Everything would be alright.

"We'll take it slowly, hmm?" he lulled, still wiping the tears rolling down my cheek. "No rush, wife. We'll do it slow and steady."

I nodded, suppressing my tears until I succeeded. Sam even offered me a handkerchief to blow my nose. I only realized he had a handkerchief after blowing on it, holding it with both my hands.

"How come you carry handkerchiefs now?" I asked with a shaking voice. Sam chuckled as he shrugged.

"Well, I have a son who tends to create a mess. So, it became a habit."

I crumpled the handkerchief together, placing my hand on my lap. "I'm so proud of you," I muttered, my voice coarse from all that crying and hiccuping.

"Well, thank you." Sam laughed as a smug smirk resurfaced on his face. I stared at him as he gazed at the crowd to where Law and Adam, together with Charlotte, were immersed in the storytelling. It made me wonder what it was all about for everyone to focus.

I cleared my throat once I recovered from my initial drama. My eyes veered forward as my lips parted.

"Sam, what happened during the five years? Why did you become the emperor? And why are we in Minowa?" I asked in a soft voice, without looking at him. "How is Yul? Sivi? and Klaus? And how come Ramin and Charlotte had become your right and left hand? Mister Fabian, what about him? Heliot and Beatrice, what happened to them? And most importantly, what happened to Stefan and Zero?"

I felt Sam gaze at me, so I turned my head to him. All I could do was shrug after bombarding him with a series of questions. It just felt like I had to ask him now, or we not might get a chance later.

Sam didn't complain, though. He simply let out a long hummed, peeling his eyes away from me.

"What happened during these five years, huh?" he mumbled, trying to recall the last five years while I was in my slumber. Sam seemed to struggle to recall things that happened, which made me furrow my brows.

"Actually, there's nothing worth noting about the past five years. Heliot threatened to snatch you away from me if I can't protect you, so I became an emperor so I can put him in his place. It turns out fine since I can do more with this authority." My brows raised at what he said about Heliot.

That man threatened Sam to snatch me? I almost doubted his words, but Heliot and I had a deal. It was still a miracle he didn't kill me.

"Why we are in Minowa is simple; I don't want to raise my son inside the palace or let him be surrounded by malicious people who will feed him poisonous thoughts. Minowa is the farthest place from the capital, so it's the best option." Sam nodded, agreeing with his own explanation.

"About Yul, Silvia, and Klaus... Yul is the new Duke of Grimsbanne, Klaus is the chief knight of the Earl in Monarey, and Silvia was granted the title of Marchioness of the east. They're doing fine so far and became popular not just in the lands they dwell, but also in the high society."

"Really...?" my eyes softened upon hearing how those three made a name on their own. I didn't even inquire how they got into those places, since it was obvious. Sam must've ordered them to oversee those lands.

"They made me proud," he muttered and I could not help but nod as well.

"They surely never disappoint," came out a whisper as a subtle smile resurfaced on my lips. I missed those three and I would want to meet them again. I was excited to listen to their story.

"Fabian is still a butler, although he is now the head butler of another estate called the House Roux." Sam cast me a knowing look with a large grin. "He just returned after his vacation. I'm sure he had prepared a banquet once we return later."

"Fabi...."

Chapter 448 - She Fell Head Over Heels

I was relieved to hear that Fabian stuck with Sam until now. Although I knew Fabian was like Sam's tail, it still made me worried that he was not with my husband anymore.

"Then, how come Ramin and Charlotte had become your right and left hand?" I perked my head up, staring curiously at Sam.

"Well, it just happened." Sam tilted his head to the side, blinking cluelessly. "Rufus had to stay in the imperial capital and I can't entrust the military power to anyone else but him. Although Fabian was capable, he is like a double-edged sword. I don't know when he will get crazy, so I kept him as a butler. That job had kept him composed, and he is an excellent teacher for Law."

I was instantly frozen in place as I gazed at Sam with horror. Did he say Mister Fabian was tutoring my son? Sam took notice of my aghast expression as he glanced at me and chuckled.

"Don't worry. I checked Fabian's lesson plan and approved it."

"No..." I shook my head as my eyes continued to grow wide out of horror and slapped his shoulder. "Sam, you also checked the lesson plan Mister Fabian had for me in the past!"

Over five years ago, back when I was managing the duchy, I always wanted to make the education system my husband started better. So, I studied it and got the opportunity to see Mister Fabian's original lesson plan. To my horror, it was helpful, albeit differently.

Thanks to Rufus, who suggested that the lesson plan should go through different teachers in Grimsbanne, it was revised. Still, those poor scholars had to deal with nightmares after reading it.

I could only imagine the mountains of missing person reports if not for Rufus. So it was safe to say, I didn't trust Fabian and Sam in this area.

Sam pouted while rubbing his shoulder where I slapped. "But Ramin took part in it and almost butted heads with Fabian. So, before the two clashed, I got my son a different tutor."

"Really?" I heaved a deep sigh of relief upon hearing that. Mister Fabian was smart, but he sometimes used it in a different way. It was not safe for a young mind like Law to have him as a tutor.

"Is he that bad?" he murmured with genuine wonder in his voice. "But I do remember you saying he is a wonderful tutor back in Grimsbanne."

My brows twitched as I took a deep breath. Now that reckless remark came and bite me, huh?

"I was clueless that time, husband," I said helplessly, controlling my expression. "I didn't know that I was actually taking the road of a serial killer — although I had always been before that."

"Well." Sam shrugged as he cleared his throat. "Law goes to the Academy now. He doesn't like being homeschooled anymore, so he's been attending the Academy since last year."

"Really?"

He nodded as an answer. All the worries I had just now gradually vanished. I set my eyes back to where my son was at and smiled subtly.

"I really missed a lot, huh?" I whispered as it saddened me how I missed my son's many firsts.

"How can I make up for that?"

"You have forever to make up to him." Sam raised a hand and planted it on my head. "He hadn't experienced everything yet. You missed a few first, but there is a ton of first he hadn't done yet."

My lips pressed together as they hooked into a smile. "Yes. I'll surely be there to witness a thousand first."

Sam and I exchanged smiles before we turned our gaze ahead. The story seemed to be getting interesting as the crowd listening to the narrator were looking at him intently.

"So, Ramin and Charlotte just happened to be there when you're choosing your right and left hand?" I inquired under my breath, glancing at Charlotte sitting behind my son and Adam.

"Aside from that, they were perfect for the job. They've proved that many times."

A chuckle slipped past my lips as I noticed Charlotte's maid attire. "Who would have thought that your right hand will willingly wear and act as a maid?"

"Well, my left hand is a stable boy." Sam humored, which made us both chuckle.

"Oh, Sam..." I cast him a look while sighing in relief. "Didn't they hate you?"

"Who knows? But so far, they didn't try to kill me. Even I am surprised how they were so into with their disguise."

Another wave of chuckles came out from us that drifted into the soft blow of the wind. I felt relaxed as all the tension in my body eased up. This felt good, I thought. A day like this... we never had such a day back in the capital.

"So Heliot returned to the Karo Kingdom?" I asked after a moment of silence between us. I heard him say, "yes", so I nodded.

"He planned to kill me. We had an agreement, Sam."

"I know, but who would dare touch you? The emperor's beloved wife?" Sam cocked his head to me, sporting a knowing look. "Also, that question is better asked to him directly. It's not like I like Heliot, but I don't hate him. He is just a strange man."

I bit my lower lips while playing with my fingers. "He is. It's hard to read him."

Sam didn't speak after that, as he simply rocked his head. In our brief silence, I could not help but wonder how was Heliot doing? Just like Yul, Silvia, and Klaus, Heliot was a good friend. I hoped he was alright during these five years.

"Don't think of Heliot too much or I might have a reason to dislike him." I raised my head at Sam and caught him casting me a side eye. "I am a jealous man."

"I was just thinking if he had been alright. I mean, Prince Heliot is a strange man, but also an unfortunate one," I explained as a matter of fact. "Although we had a deal that he will kill me, there is just this part of me that believed he wouldn't if I told him to."

Sam looked at me with a strange look, but I didn't dwell on it. Instead, I changed the topic before he got triggered by Heliot.

"How about Beatrice? Did she return to the Cross Kingdom?" I inquired, after slapping my thigh lightly. My husband snapped his eyes and blinked countless times.

"That person..." my brows furrowed at how he addressed her. "She's still in the capital. The last time I heard about her, she is frequenting her visit to Grimsbanne."

"Huh?" I tilted my head, waiting for an explanation.

Sam cast me a look and blinked twice.. "She fell head over heels at the Duke of Grimsbanne."

Chapter 449 - [Bonus]Her Clue

"She fell head over heels at the Duke of Grimsbanne."

It took me a minute to process what Sam said just now. When I absorbed this news, my eyes dilated as my mouth fell open. I didn't hear him wrong, right? Beatrice and Yul? What?

Sam rocked his head, closed-lipped. "I don't know the details since I don't care about them, but I remembered Yulis sending me a letter concerning this."

"Was it a wedding invitation?" I blurted out, horrified at the thought of Yul getting married.

"No. Rather a complaint." I didn't know whether to heave a sigh of relief or feel sorry for Yul or Beatrice at Sam's correction. "I think Beatrice is courting Yulis, but the latter had adamantly rejected her sincerity. He must be very stressed for him to send me a complaint."

"Goodness..." now my curiosity was piqued. Never in my imagination that Beatrice would fall for Yul.

Although Beatrice was the person who would sell her soul to get what she wanted, I liked her character. She had this strong sense of proving that she was capable. Our story together wasn't that complicated as she was the person who reached out to me back when I was managing the Duchy.

How we ended up being an ally was simple. Beatrice wanted something, and my goal would help her reach that. We came to terms, and she gave me intel about the palace. Of course, she was open about her relationship with Alphonse. So I didn't trust her that much and used her as a backup plan.

Now that I thought about it, I was wary of her, even when I liked her. She's that type of character. Hence, it made me wonder what happened to her to fall for Yul? Not that Yul wasn't worthy; actually he was more than admirable.

Still... it was an odd combination.

"Don't worry. Yulis wouldn't give in easily." His voice brought me back to the current lapse, making me look up at him.

"If Yulis had sent a letter of complaint to you instead of banning Beatrice from entering Grimsbanne, I don't think so, my husband."

Sam chuckled as he looked at my pale expression. "You don't like Beatrice as your sister-in-law?"

"No." My answer was quick as I shook my head. "She is a good ally, but I don't know? Maybe it's just... I'm being overprotective of Yul, but it's an odd mix. I mean, the two of them."

"I see... will you object if they ended up getting married?" he asked with his brow raised. This time, I didn't answer immediately as I gazed ahead and sighed.

"How can I?" came out a murmur. "If Beatrice makes Yul happy... how dare I interfere? Yul deserved to be happy too, you know?"

"Well, they are adults. They will settle things on their own." Sam winked at me before staring ahead. There was once again a moment of silence between us, but the air was light and harmonious.

"How about Stefan and Zero?" I queried after a long silence and hung my head low. "What happened to them, Sam?"

Sam didn't speak for a long time until I set my eyes back on him. To my surprise, his expression and aura felt a little eerie. I gulped, hearing my own swallow, and kept my mouth shut.

"Stefan... until now, there are no leads about him. He just... vanished, just like that. Stefan and his shadow knights." Sam explained after a minute. His tone was solemn, and I knew this was an issue he had at the back of his head.

"How can that be?" I wondered under my breath while clutching the stuffed animal on my lap.

"How can he just disappear overnight?"

"Overnight?" Sam raised a strange question and cast me a baffled look. "The Stefan you had seen isn't him, Lilou. It's that loathsome Zero."

"Huh?"

"Zero's ability was to shift and copy someone, Lilou. Although it's tricky, it also had downsides. You noticed it with Yul, so you will be fine."

My brows furrowed even though I understood his explanation. "But Stefan is there, Love. That night before my slumber, I talked to him."

"That's Zero."

"No," I argued quickly, making him furrow his brows. "I know Stefan, Sam. Even though our relationship was complicated, I know if the person I am talking to is Stefan or an impostor."

Sam narrowed his eyes suspiciously at me. I looked at him with conviction in my eyes.

"Sam, what the hell is going on?" I asked when I couldn't take his silence anymore. "Have you faced this Stefan you are calling Zero?"

The glint that flickered across his eyes told me the answer I was looking for. Sam didn't have the chance to face that Stefan he believed Zero. Considering everything that happened, I couldn't blame him.

"Heliot clashed with him," Sam informed me, and this made me cock my head to the side. "And I doubt he was telling me lies. Heliot will be either an ally or an enemy and he will assure his side is clear."

I nodded as I agreed with Sam. Heliot was that type of guy, and he was the last person who would scheme. We could be wrong, but I trusted my gut feeling.

"Then, how come Heliot didn't notice?" I wondered. "If he is certain Zero posed as Stefan, then who is that person I met? Dominique and Alistair were with him, they must have..."

"Alistair is dead and Dominique has no clue." I trailed when Sam relayed this news to me. Alistair was dead? There were a few questions that rose in my head, but they were mostly simple curiosity.

Sam narrowed his eyes and hummed a low tune. "This is a headache, but at least, we now have some clues."

"Clues?"

"Mhm. What you said just now opens up new possibilities." He cocked his head to me and smiled.
"Don't worry too much about it. This time, I assure you I will handle it properly."

"Sam..."

"Mother!"

Suddenly, I heard Law's voice and turned my head in his direction. When I saw how this young boy rush to us with the young earl, my heart warmed up.

"Then, I entrust our life to you, Your Majesty," I whispered while waiting for my son to approach us. It was then I cast Sam a look and smiled gently when he replied.

"I will never disappoint you and our son this time..... for sure."

Chapter 450 - Father, Do You Think The Emperor Is Great?

We idled in the plaza for quite some time before deciding to go home before night falls. Adam, the young Earl, had to go back home. But because of Law's reluctant gaze, Sam and I ended up inviting the young Earl to our humble estate. Obviously, this should be a problem... but Jaime Malum wouldn't apprehend my husband, would he?

"Father, is the emperor just like what that narrator said? Do you think he is as great as the people believed?"

Suddenly, on our way home while we were inside the carriage, my son raised a question. Law was sitting beside me and across from us were Sam and Adam. Sam's brows rose as his eyes fell on our son.

"That storytelling is about the emperor?" my husband inquired with little interest.

"Yes. We were listening to the Great Emperor of the empire and how he unified the land," Law explained while rocking his head. "It's mostly the story of his reign and how great of a man he is."

Sam cast me a look and when we broke our eye contact, he gazed back at Law and then at Adam. The curious young boys waited for Sam to confirm if the emperor was what the narrator described.

I bit my lower lip, knowing Sam agreeing with them was just another way of bragging. Well, it was the truth, though.

"Well, how do you consider a man great?" to my surprise, Sam cocked his head with a misplaced puzzlement plastered on his face. "I don't know the details of the story, but I'm very sure it is all sugarcoated to hide his tyranny."

"So, the emperor is not as what they said he is?" A frown dominated Law's face as he looked down.

"Well, that makes sense."

Sam arched a brow, baffled at the reaction of his son. "My son, were you disappointed?"

"Yes, Father. I thought if the emperor is as just as what the narrator said, maybe he can help Adam. But thinking that the south doesn't apply the laws of the capital, maybe it isn't true." Law pressed his lips in a thin line and cast the timid young Earl an apologetic look. He fidgeted with his fingers and let out another deep sigh.

"Father, can you just adopt Adam?"

"Law!" Adam called as his breath hitched, face flushed from my son's straightforwardness. He lowered his head when Sam patted it gently.

"My son, I understand you are friends with his lordship. However, we are still commoners who simply had enough money to live in luxury. How dare we even think about adopting his lordship when we should be bowing to him?" Sam looked at his son with a knowing look, arms crossed.

Law glanced up and bit his lower lip before shifting his eyes to me. My heart instantly ached for him, knowing that he truly wanted to help the young earl.

'My kind child...' My thoughts trailed off when Sam suddenly spoke.

"My son, please don't use your mother like that." I frowned at Sam's remarks and looked at him with a dead expression. Sam was shaking his head slightly.

"Also, we shouldn't be talking about this since his lordship isn't even speaking."

I wanted to tell him to reconsider, but he was right. My eyes fell on Adam, who had his head hung low. Right now, we weren't La Crox, but we're Roux. Even though Sam had the power to adopt this young Earl, it would be more complicated than that. Instead of helping him, this might result in a more tricky situation.

"But... why?" asked Law but Adam raised his head this time.

"Sir Roux is right, Law. We shouldn't be talking about this. I'm already happy that I get to spend time with you. I can't ruin Sir Roux and Jaime's good relationship." The young Earl offered my son a kind smile, but my son replied with a deep sigh.

"Father," Law called after a moment of silence, raising his chin up. He waited for Sam's full attention before he spoke.

"I want to become a knight," He announced solemnly. "Once I come of age, I will go to the capital and apply to become a knight."

"Oh? Really?"

"I will come to face the emperor and tell him about the situation in the south."

Sam's mouth fell open as he nodded. "Right..."

"So, I want to train now and..."

Law continued to speak about his plans to prepare himself to become a knight. We could only listen to him helplessly, biting my lower lip while staring at Sam. My husband seemed to be rendered speechless. This was the downside of hiding his son's origin.

"... and then, I will challenge the military general. I need to become so strong so that I can also protect mother and father and Adam."

"Law..." I called softly while patting his head. I felt moved by his last remarks. For this child to think of protecting us was quite touching.

"You will protect us?" Sam inquired while arching his brow. "You?"

"Yes. I will not let anyone look down on us again," the young child murmured. "Or let anyone take advantage of you again because of me. They said becoming a knight will give us a noble title, too. People don't respect you, Father. They respect your fortune."

Sam stared at Law in silence while the latter looked down. A weak smile appeared on my lips while rubbing my son's back before gazing up at Sam. I knew he was trying to be a good father to Law and protect him in his own way, but my son was still too emotional to understand. That sometimes, not fighting back wasn't called cowardice.

"I'm sure you will become a skilled knight, Law," I said, making Law look up at me. "Once you grow older, please protect us. But right now, let us protect you, alright?"

Law pressed his lips together and nodded. He moved closer to me until there was no more gap between us, making me chuckle.

"You should rest first," I motioned for him to lay his head on my lap, which he did.

After that conversation, we traveled back in silence. I stroked my son's hair until he fell asleep with his head on my lap. Adam, on the other hand, just kept quiet beside Sam.

"Aren't you tired as well, my lord?" I asked Adam, breaking the silence inside the carriage.

"No, Madam Roux. Thank you." His polite smile warmed my heart. This poor boy was so kind that I understood why Law was so into protecting him.

As silence enveloped the ride home, I gazed at Sam. He was still in the same stance; his leg resting over the other with his arms crossed. His eyes were fixed on our son on my lap, as if deep in thoughts.

"Sam," I called, and he snapped his eyes at me. "It's alright. Our son will come to understand you once he grows older. We shouldn't worry for now about this. Instead, we should focus on his upcoming birthday."

"Right..." A weak smile appeared on his lips and I swear I wanted to make him feel better. I knew he didn't want to worry our son, but this situation was very tricky.

Surely, having a child wasn't that easy, and Law was slowly having ambition. I wouldn't deny that I was alarmed for my son and what he had said previously.

"Law is doing all this because of me..." suddenly, the young Lord's weak voice caressed our ears. "I'm sorry, Madam and Sir Roux. If only I am more... powerful."

"Boy, it's not your fault. My son will choose his own path of his own accord." Sam planted his palm on Adam's head and offered a kind smile. "And I will protect you both.. Jaime will not harm you anymore, I won't let him."